



Concluding Commentary: Response to Eugene and Kiyo



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Abstract

At the risk of speaking on his behalf I could almost swear I heard Bakhtin laughing gleefully over my shoulder as I read this fascinating dialogue between Eugene and Kiyo. His reason for this might be partly inspired by the glaring misunderstandings both men reveal through their associated interplay with key pedagogical concepts. While polemic in nature, it occurs to me, somewhat ironically, that each man makes the same careful, empirically located, argument from different cultural and philosophical standpoints. At the centre of their debate is the concept of pedagogy and its capacity to promote 'authentic' learning. Despite this shared agenda their interpretations of key terms are often at variance and, as a result, they passionately bang their heads against each other in vehement misunderstanding that makes for what Bakhtin (2004) would describe as "lively and expressive" debate (p. 24) on this topic.

At its essence, I suggest that their points of difference can be lodged within the realms of epistemology and ontology, and associated concepts that warrant further exploration such as aesthetics, freedom, agency and education. Each are laid bare according to the interpretations of both Kiyo and Eugene who clearly draw from different sources to make their claims. Kiyo is clearly influenced by social psychology, philosophers such as Gadamer and the traditions of his own society while Eugene takes a stance that radically challenges these approaches, summoning Bakhtinian dialogism as a central orientation. In this location the posed frame is negotiated and the endpoint suspended as purpose takes precedence over 'outcome'. What takes precedence in classrooms will not be determined by a set curriculum but by the relationship between teacher and learners, arising out of a dialogic event. The same is not true for Kiyo, who argues for specific practices of argumentation as a route to the discovery of valued knowledge as the central tenet of the teacher. Taking such different stances it is hardly surprising, therefore, that the views of Kiyo and Eugene are often at odds – Eugene is interested in an unending dialogue while Kiyo seeks fusion, albeit in a hermeneutic sense. Pedagogy is at once suspended in a tug-of-war between dialogic and dialectic orientations – a point both Eugene and others have made elsewhere (Matusov, 2011; Sullivan, 2010; Sullivan, Smith, & Matusov, 2009; White, 2014). It is, therefore, hardly surprising, that in the end Kiyo is led to ask if Eugene is really talking about pedagogy at all! They are, in essence, singing completely different tunes!

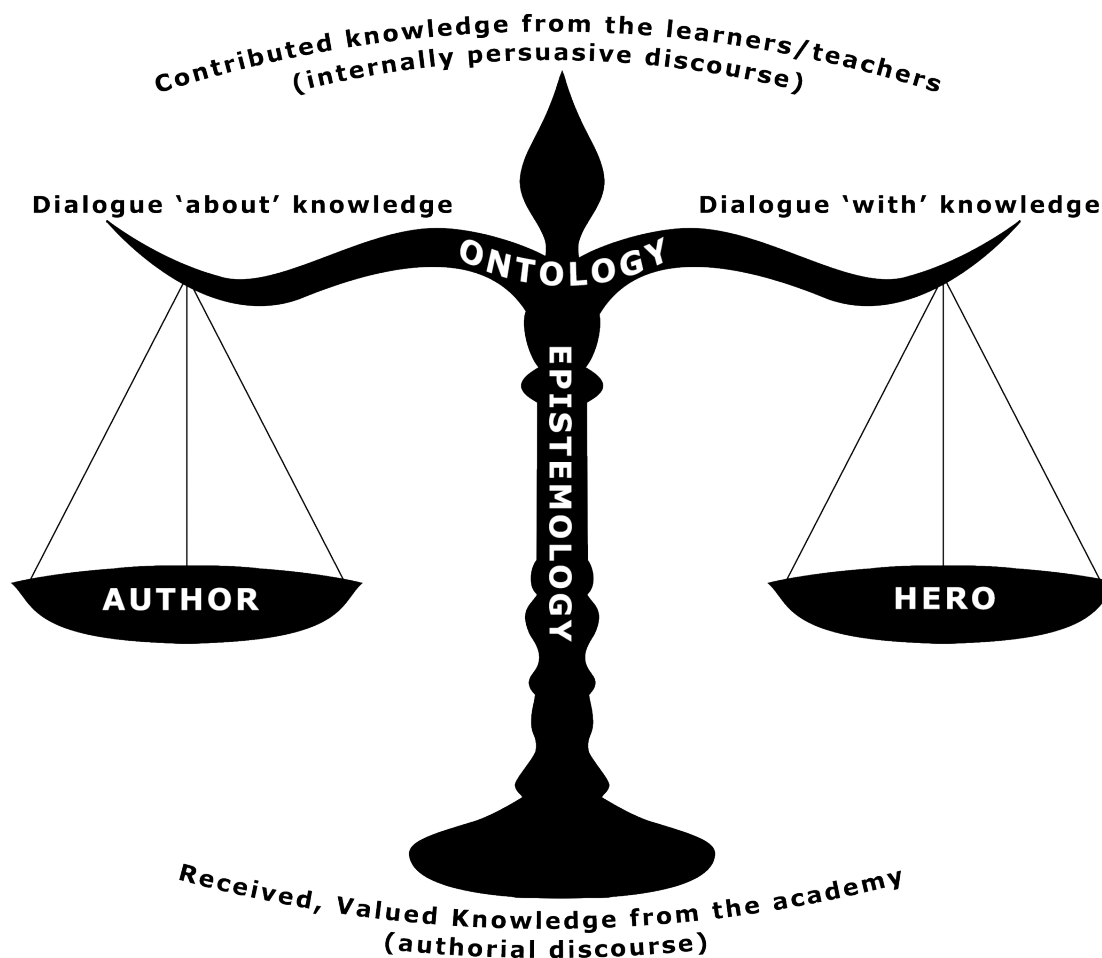
Throughout this discussion, I was reminded of the little boy in “The Emperor’s New Clothes” who is the first to realise that the King is actually naked. Kiyo’s revelation that ontological non-instrumental dialogic approaches, as Eugene describes, do not represent pedagogy betrays his own ideological position that pedagogy must involve “active” engagement “in order to facilitate the learning and development of their (that is, the students’) agency” (p.?). It is here where their positions take flight, since Eugene makes the consistent argument that engagement takes many forms, and orients from both learner and teacher, while Kiyo appears to be suggesting that it must be framed around important questions that are always constructed by the teacher as someone who transmits knowledge from the lofty heights of the academy. The positioning of the teacher and student by Kiyo and Eugene, respectfully, serve to raise important critiques around the notion of dialogism and its place within pedagogical approaches in education across cultures and classrooms. Does it have a place within scholastic regimes of truth in the contemporary classroom or is it only possible in the unending optimism of Bakhtin’s novelistic inquiries that form the basis of his approaches?

Yet it seems to me that an examination of dialogic pedagogy in contemporary societies is a very important exploration to take for this very reason. The concept of dialogic pedagogy is now employed across diverse approaches to teaching and learning. In my view there is much misunderstanding of the term and its outcry in practice. The term ‘dialogic pedagogy’ has come to serve as a broad category for any learning and teaching practice that involves ‘dialogue’ and, to some extent or other, implicates learning relationships (White, 2011a). For this reason Eugene’s model, and Kiyo’s critique, is of great importance – for me this is not because it offers a conclusive portrayal of all pedagogy (this would be antithetical in a Bakhtinian sense), nor because it dichotomises specific approaches such as non-dialogic from instrumental (a point I concur with Kiyo on in this regard) - but because it provides a beginning means of *examining* approaches. Eugene does so by interrogating their origins, orientations and intended purposes of each as a form of categorisation. In this sense, Eugene makes pedagogy accountable (or in Bakhtin’s terms ‘answerable’) to itself – in terms of its genesis, its focus and its outcome. In my reading Kiyo appears to ignore the first two of these – emphasising the intended purpose and advocating for a method of achieving this agreed purpose. In this respect I would suggest he aids Eugene’s argument because he locates desirable pedagogy within Eugene’s “Epistemological II” category without recognising this orientation for what it is. He does this through his unceasing loyalty and conviction towards the expertise of the teacher, enshrined within the method of Saitou he promotes. In doing so, he highlights the very point Eugene is at pains to make – that pedagogy should be much more than *poiesis*, embracing *phronesis* and *sophia* (see Matusov & Brobst, 2013). In the case of Kiyo it seems that the learner is to be shaped towards a wisdom that is passed over to them by the teacher, who acts as the agent of valued cultural knowledge. Here *phronesis* is not considered because there is no need to consider knowledge beyond that which is received from the academy.

Much ground is covered in the discussion between Kiyo and Eugene. A beginning place for my response lies in an interrogation of the agreements and disagreements that exist between the two. Taking Eugene’s lead, based on the inspiration of his model of dialogic and conventional pedagogies, I summarise these in the form of a set of scales that situate learners and teachers as interchangeable heroes and/or authors; teachers or learners; instructors or collaborators in terms of their ideological stance. The status of both embeds itself within the horizontal and vertical axis that privilege or suspend approaches of knowing versus those that respond to the internally persuasive discourses, and which are suspended in the classroom heteroglot. These include attitudes and approaches of ‘wonderment’ and uncertainty on the part of teacher and student alike. Both Eugene and Kiyo bring these concepts into view throughout their polemic, and in doing so, illuminate the point that pedagogies are not simply methods of practice, but arise out of specific ontological and epistemological domains. As portrayed in figure 1

below, Kiyo, appears to situate pedagogy at the foundation of the scales, as received knowledge that is epistemologically oriented to author-hero binaries, suggesting balance; while Eugene brings all parts of the ontological and epistemological frame into view. In this conception the scales may tip towards one end or the other at any moment, depending on the orientation of the event, and its chronotope. Pedagogy, in this view, is fluid, with transient potential towards 'other'.

Figure 1: Balancing the scales - Heroes and Authors in Pedagogy



Central to interpreting this model is the interesting debate that takes place between Kiyo and Eugene regarding authors and heroes. It is one that I recall took root during our symposium in Italy three years ago (Matusov, Miyazaki, Dysthe & White, 2011). At that time I was deeply immersed in Bakhtin's earliest works, particularly his essay "Author and hero in Aesthetic Activity" (in Bakhtin, 1990) where the author-hero relationship could be interpreted in a somewhat binary fashion. Here Bakhtin describes the author as "a participant of the event and as an authoritative guide" (p. 207). To the extent of this depiction Kiyo is right to highlight the classroom teacher as author. However when Bakhtin's accompanying statements are considered in tandem with his later work, a strong moral purpose is brought to bear on this relationship. Bakhtin states that the author "cannot and must not assume for us the determinateness of a person, for we are *in* him, we enter into and adapt his active seeing" (p. 207).

Seen in light of Goethe's *bildungsroman* (a novelistic genre keenly adopted by Bakhtin in his analysis and which influenced his theory of 'visual surplus', the author is drawn into a position of "outsidedness" (p. 205) with obligations to offer insight to the hero but to do so within an "unmediated axiological relationship" (p. 197).

In Bakhtin's (1943) short text "The Man in the Mirror" this complex relationship between self and other is expanded to a relational 'with-ness' that collapses the author-hero binary. Here, the author is also authored, and the hero is equally an author through the visual surplus of both parties that image the 'other'. As Bakhtin explains:

It is not that I look from the inside with my own eyes at the world, but rather it I look at myself through the eyes of the world, through alien eyes; I am possessed with the other. There is not the naïve oneness of the external and internal here. To peep at how I am seen behind my back. The naïve nature of the merger of self and other in the mirror image. The surplus of the other. I have no point of view on myself from the outside, I have no access to my own inner image. Alien eyes look through my eyes. (Bakhtin, 1943, p. 71)

In my view this is a very significant point in understanding the author-hero relationship in teaching too. I think it may be this complex relationship that Eugene gives weight to in his discussion, whilst Kiyo emphasises the notion of author as 'guide' without recognising the important role that the author also plays in such guidance— thus orienting towards a subjectivity of selfhood rather than a logic of otherness (see Petrelli, 2013, for a fuller description of this idea). His literal interpretation of the Dostoevskian author takes this deeply into the domain of authority (see for instance his depiction of the "author who controls the heroes' behaviour"). Kiyo's position here, suggests a misappropriation of Bakhtin's polyphonic entreaty – a point I return to later.

What appears to be largely absent in both men's discussion is Bakhtin's portrayal of the hero as a character, a body and a soul that exists *only in relationship* with others across time and space – concepts that were to later form part of Bakhtin's chronotope (Morson & Emerson, 1990). Central to dialogism is the principle that form can only have meaning when enjoined with content – that is, meaning arises out of social interaction. Arising out of these early depictions, a positioning of the student as hero also has merit, in my view, because at once the student is upheld as an agentic subject who operates on "two planes of axiological perception" – both [1] "within that horizon for the hero himself; and [2] the context of the author-contemplator" (p. 174). Thus the hero is viewed in a much broader sense rather than merely as an object for intervention or instruction (a point that I would urge Eugene to consider in any dismissal of this early work). Viewed in this way Eugene's claim that students ought to be able to surprise their teacher is upheld and, of course, the reverse is true if there is a balance, as the teacher may deliberately invite a "frame clash" to orient dialogue in a particular direction. I would go one step further to suggest that, on this basis, students should also be able to retain their own 'authorial loophole' (a Dostoevskian tenet) as a means of escaping the phenomenon of being fully known (an aesthetic position that, from this perspective, can never be claimed by an author who is dealing with characters in a novel, let alone real people in the classroom). I suggest that this is a fuller appreciation of the Bakhtinian hero who retains the chameleon-like potential to be other, transforming and transgressing interpretation (a point I have been at pains to make in my own writing – see White, 2011b, 2013a); while at the same time remaining answerable to others for his or her acts in the social milieu. Taking this stance the author-hero relationship plays a vital role in a view of learning as meaning-making – an event-of-being that can now be conceptualised as an act of knowledge generation based on an understanding of oneself and other in the world.

What is important for interpreting the author-hero binary, therefore, is the point that Bakhtin consistently makes about the authors relationship as “unmediated and axiological” (p. 197) orientation towards the hero as a boundary encounter (White, 2013b). Here Bakhtin offers a strong cautionary note to the relationship as one that must be encountered with care, respect and morality such that the hero is not “consummated” (p. 121) by the author in their encounters. It is here where I take issue with Kiyo’s interpretation since the Saitou teacher is determining what is of value, and what is mundane. Kiyo’s example of questioning techniques to students in their analysis of the poem, in my view, serve as a device of consummation because the student is first asked a closed question and then told that their answer is incorrect. That the teacher then proceeds to congratulate them on their ‘efforts’ (ie “your thought is very good” - spoken, “but it is still wrong” - unspoken) does little to ameliorate the finalising impact of this statement. The dilemma, such approaches represent for learners, are well described by Eugene as “pedagogical violence” at their extreme and provide an example of the Epistemological II pedagogy I have already suggested this form of pedagogy represents.

A less delineated approach to the author-hero relationship is examined by Bakhtin (1984; 1968) in his later works (published earlier) that were clearly influenced, as Kiyo points out, by Dostoevsky. Rabelais and others (see for example Goethe) play a significant role in this regard also. Here the author-hero divide is suspended because Bakhtin encounters the interanimation of roles and associated notions of discursion in terms of heteroglossia and polyphony. It is at this later period that Eugene’s ontological approach to dialogic pedagogy gains momentum and the hero-author divide is cleanly severed. Eugene offers an example of this in his depiction of a family dialogue. Through an appreciation of grandaunt Klara’s perspective, arising out of her “love of truth” (p. 13), and its impact on Rosa, Eugene gained a richer interpretation of what might be construed as an insult on one level, or as a helpful commentary on another. The puzzlement that arose from this irreconcilable encounter – between “mama-truth” and “Gricean maxims of good communication” – provided a means of understanding the participants, the boundaries of their ontological positions, but also of understanding themselves. At once logic and axiology is entwined. The author and hero binary of this encounter is thus suspended because both parties are actively engaging with each other, shaping and re-shaping the experience as an event-of-being or chronotopic threshold (White, 2013b). In this locale questions arise out of asking genuine questions of significance or matters of urgency to the learner and the potential for counter-point debate and dialogue. We are not told whether Klara accepted Eugene’s position (or vice versa), nor do we know if the debates were resolved, but from a dialogic standpoint it does not matter – here emphasis lies in the dialogic exchange as an opportunity to examine points-of-view rather than a resolution of what is right or wrong.

Yet, Eugene does not explore the necessary conditions for ontological non-instrumental dialogic approaches to take place. In the many examples he has provided over recent years (see, for example, teenager Hannah’s scientific examination of Big Bang theory or Zion’s study of compound words in Matusov, 2011) Eugene presents personal examples of dialogic pedagogy where he is the teacher. Unlike Kiyo’s classroom descriptions of Tsukamoto, Eugene is not committed to pre-established questioning as the primary activity in the classroom but, instead, to the maintenance of dialogues of difference. Questions are not set in advance of the dialogue in this approach, but arise out of inquiring dialogues that take the form of prompts such as “Why” and “how”? Elsewhere Eugene examines these approaches and the conditions that give rise to them as discrete pedagogical chronotopes (Matusov, 2009) but Eugene, perhaps modestly, does not acknowledge the tremendous skill that is required for such pedagogy – and the constant vigilance required of the teacher in ensuring that the students internally persuasive discourses are not lost in the learning experience. These ontological dialogues are founded on the principle that learning is an event-of-being rather than an end-point quest. What this

means for pedagogy is deeply implicated in Eugene and Kiyo's debates, and seem to suggest that a completely different set of skills are needed for dialogic pedagogies based on their associated orientations – these invoke a moral response to teaching and learning, as a movement away from instrumentalisation towards open-ness and encounter with other-ness (a point explicitly raised by Bakhtin, 2004 in relation to pedagogy). In this regard Eugene is right, I think, to differentiate between epistemological and social justice pedagogical agendas but I would also see a relationship between these and Epistemological II orientations examined as I am not yet convinced of their non-instrumental location.

Having revealed what I believe to be the source of their polemic I also want to point out other potential origins and orientations that have, in my view, been neglected in this discussion. These include the rich legacy Bakhtin brings educationalists in relation to aesthetics and its role in pedagogy. In making this claim I draw from Bakhtin's (2004) own writing on classroom practice where he sets a very clear agenda for pedagogy beyond what he describes as 'schoolification'. It is in this work that I suggest Kiyo's dilemma regarding the existence of pedagogy may be reconciled. Here Bakhtin presents the teacher with responsibility as author for the hero. His statement "hero is the duty of teachers of writing" implicates the teacher as pedagogically responsible. While I agree with Eugene that the learner brings agency with them (that is, that the teacher or classroom cannot create agency in a learner) the potential of this agency to be unleashed is directly related to the kinds of pedagogies in which the learner is located when this author is considered to its fullest potential. Agency might be brought to bear on processes or events that are situated outside of the teacher's composition, such as those that are evident in carnivalesque moments of engagement or disengagement (White, 2012; 2013b), or in events that are intended for a different author (such as the authorial "I"). The extent to which agency is brought to bear on any learning experience is much more complicated than a comparison of epistemology and ontology in a binaric sense. Kiyo's statements regarding the epistemological aspects of ontology highlight this complexity but do not resolve their interplay. His neglect of 'becoming' – a central position for Bakhtin containing a greater degree of uncertainty and potential for heroes to become authors themselves – reduces his argument to rhetoric. Perhaps, therefore, it is not by chance that Kiyo returns to psychology to summon notions of consciousness and unconsciousness in making his claim. In my view Bakhtin would not make such a distinction (indeed he would take issue with the suggestion that humans are 'animals') – since his emphasis was always on the conscious interlocutor in the event rather than any form of reflection in its aftermath. As a 'product,' knowledge ceases to exist for Bakhtin. Instead, it lives in the ontological and epistemological encounter, a point further embellished by Skukauskaite & Green (2004): "Students are named as, and become, authors, authors can argue with the editor, and the editor is not the final arbiter of perspective". (p. 69). This stance further challenges Kiyo's attention to the Dostoevskian author who has authority over the text. In this complex view of authors and heroes, authority belongs to the hero who asserts their own *bildung*¹ and, in so doing, claims their status as author of their own learning.

My argument rests, therefore, on the living nature of learning and the endless potential of learners – both student and teacher. On this basis it becomes difficult to determine, from the lofty heights of academia, what kinds of pedagogy will generate learning, for whom and how. Kiyo's claim that "for a lesson to be dialogic, there should be a genuine question at the beginning" creates, in my view, another monologic approach to pedagogy by prescribing one method. What Eugene offers, on the other hand, is the possibility for teachers to analyse methods in terms of their orientation, and purpose. In my view his model should therefore be interpreted as an analytic device rather than some form of judgment or preferred practice model. Dialogic pedagogy is not pre-determined by establishing parameters around classroom experience by those who sit outside of the experience, in my view. Instead it generates itself

¹ The notion of *bildung* places emphasis in learning as a life-long process of becoming. For a fuller discussion see Brandist, 2014.

out of intense curiosity for individual learners - their interests, priorities and ideological orientations - in tandem with knowledge that is valued by the academy (here I invoke Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia as another analytic tool). For diverse learners (and here I include infants, and other groups of people who may not share the same semiotic approaches) what constitutes dialogic pedagogy rests in the event itself, and its potential to open up spaces for ontologic engagement with knowledge. Thus what is deemed 'good pedagogy' is less oriented by its outcome or its orientation alone (although of course these are significant factors for classroom teachers that cannot be ignored – as Olga Dysthe, 2011, points out) than its potential to open up meaningful dialogue about matters of importance to 21st century learners. In taking this stance I believe the teacher can take up an authorship role Bakhtin promoted – by recognising that heroes determine their own learning with the help (or hindrance) of others. All the teacher can do, *and it is no trivial event*, is to remain open to the endless potential and possibility for dialogue to orient meaning. Seen in this light perhaps Kiyo is right to challenge traditional (Socratic) notions of pedagogy that assume orientation lies in the hands of the teacher, as midwife. While the term may be anachronistic, when viewed as a certain and embedded discourse drawing from Plato's paidea, broader attention to 'pedagogy' as a means of talking about teaching and learning acts offers a useful framework to consider how teachers might author the learner, as hero, with the goal of hero-as-author. This, I believe, is the central quest both Kiyo and Eugene seek to promote albeit in different ways and, to this end, I thank them for their discussion. It has, indeed, been most lively!

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